

# *Documents on Diplomacy: The Source*

## *John Adams Meets King George III Bath Hotel, Westminster June 2, 1785*

**D**<sup>r</sup> Sir  
During my Interview with the Marquis of Carmarthen he told me that it was Customary for every foreign Minister at his first Presentation to the King, to make his Majesty some Compliments conformable to the Spirit of his Credentials, and when Sir Clement Cottrell Dormer the Master of the Ceremonies came to inform me that he should accompany me to the Secretary of State & to Court, he said that every foreign Minister whom he had attended to the Queen had always made an Harrangue to her Majesty, & he understood, tho' he had not been present, that they always Harrangued the King.

On Tuesday Evening the Baron de Lynden called upon me and said he came from the Baron de Nolken, and had been conversing upon the singular Situation. I was sent in & agreed in Opinion that it was indispensable that I should make a Speech and that it should be as complimentary as possible—All this was parallel to the Advice lately given by the Comte de Vergennes to Mr. Jefferson, so that finding it was a Custom established at both these great Courts, and that this Court and the foreign Ministers expected it, I thought I could not avoid it altho' my first Thought & Inclination had been to deliver my Credentials silently and retire.

At one on Wednesday the first of June the Master of Ceremonies called at my House and went with me to the Secretary of State's Office in Cleveland Row, where the Marquis of Carmarthen received me and introduced me to his Under Secretary Mr. Frazier, who has been, as his Lordship said, uninterrupted in that Office thro' all the Changes in Administration for thirty Years, having first been appointed by the Earl of Holderness. After a short Conversation upon the Subject of importing my Effects from Holland & France free of Duty, which Mr. Frazier himself introduced—Lord Carmarthen invited to go with him in his Coach to Court. When we arrived in the Anti-Chamber, the *Oeil de Beuf* of St. James's, the Master of the Ceremonies met me and attended me, while the Secretary of State went to take the Commands of the King. While I stood in this Place where it seems all Ministers stand upon such Occasions, always attended by the Master of Ceremonies, the Room very full of Ministers of State, Bishops & all other sorts of Courtiers, as well as the next Room which is the King's bed Chamber, you may well suppose that I was the Focus of all Eyes. I was relieved however from the Embarrassment of it by the Swedish and Dutch Ministers, who came to me & entertained me in a very agreeable Conversa-

tion during the whole Time. Some other Gentlemen whom I had seen before, came to make their Compliments to me, until the Marquis of Carmarthen returned & desired me to go with him to his Majesty. I went with his Lordship thro' the Levee-Room into the King's Closet, the Door was shut and I was left with his Majesty and the Secretary of State alone. I made the three Reverences, one at the Door, another about half Way & the third before the Presence, according to the Usage established at this and all the Northern Courts of Europe, and then addressed myself to his Majesty in the following Words—

“Sir, The United States of America have appointed me their Minister Plenipotentiary to your Majesty, and have directed me to deliver to your Majesty this Letter which contains the Evidence of it. It is in Obedience to their express Commands that I have the Honor to assure your Majesty of their unanimous Disposition and Desire to cultivate the most friendly and liberal Intercourse between your Majesty's Subjects and their Citizens, and of the best Wishes for your Majesty's Health and Happiness and for that of your royal Family. The Appointment of a Minister from the United States to your Majesty's Court, will form an Epoch in the History of England & of America. I think myself more fortunate than all my fellow Citizens in having the distinguished Honor to be the first to stand in your Majesty's roy[al] Presence in a diplomatic Character and I shall esteem myself the happiest of Men if I can be instrumental in recommending my Country more and more to your Majesty's royal Benevolence and of restoring an entire Esteem, Confidence & Affection, or in better Words, the old good Nature and the old good Humour between People who, tho' separated by an Ocean and under different Governments, have the same Language, a similar religion & kindred Blood. I beg your Majesty's Permission to add, that altho' I had some Time before been entrusted by my Country, it was never in my whole Life in a Manner so agreeable to myself.”—

The King list'ned to every Word I said with Dignity but with an apparent Emotion—whether it was the Nature of the Interview or whether it was my visible Agitation, for I felt more than I did or could express, that touched him I cannot say—but he was much affected and answered me with more Tremor than I had spoken with, & said

“Sir—The Circumstances of thy Audience are so extraordinary, the Language you have now held is so extremely proper and the Feelings you have discovered so justly adapted to the Occasion, that

I must say that I not only receive with Pleasure the Assurances of the friendly Dispositions of the United States, but that I am very glad the Choice has fallen upon You to be their Minister. I wish you Sir, to believe, and that it may be understood in America, that I have done nothing in the late Contest, but what I thought myself indispensably bound to do, by the Duty which I owed to my People. I will be very frank with you. I was the last to consent to the Separation, but the Separation having been made and having become inevitable, I have always said, as I say now, that I would be the first to meet the Friendship of the United States as an independent Power. The Moment I see such Sentiments & Language as yours prevail, and a Disposition to give to this Country the Preference, that Moment I shall say, let the Circumstances of Language; Religion and Blood have their natural and full Effect.”

I dare not say that these were the King’s precise Words, and it is even possible that I may have in some Particular mistaken his meaning; for altho his Pronunciation is as distinct as I ever heard, he hesitated some Times between his Periods and between the Members of the same Period—He was much affected & I was not less so, and therefore I cannot be certain that I was so attentive, heard so clearly and understood so perfectly as to be confident of all his Words or Sense; And I think that all which he said to me should at present be kept a Secret in America, unless his Majesty or his Secretary of State should judge proper to report it. This I do say, that the foregoing \is/ in his Majesty’s Meaning as I then understood it, and his own Words as nearly as I can recollect them. The King then asked me whether I came last from France, and upon my answering in the Affirmative, he put on an Air of Familiarity and smiling or rather laughing said, there is an Opinion among some People that you are not the most attached of all your Countrymen to the Manners of France. I was surprized at this because I thought it an indiscretion and a Departure from the Dignity—I was a little embarrassed but determined not to deny the Truth on one Hand, nor leave him to infer from it any Attachment to England on the other. I threw off as much Gravity as I could and assumed an Air of Gaiety and a Tone of Decision as far as was decent, and said—That Opinion Sir, is not mistaken, I must avow to your Majesty, I have no

Attachment but to my own Country. The King replied as quick as Lightning an honest man will never have any other. The King then said a Word or two to the Secretary of State, which being between them I did not hear, and then turned & bowed to me, as is customary with all Kings and Princes when they give the Signal to retire. I retreated, stepping backward as is the Etiquette, and making my last reverence at the Door of the Chamber, I went my Way.—

The Master of the Ceremonies joined me the Moment of my coming out of the King’s Closet and accompanied me thro’ the Apartments to my Carriage.—I have been thus minute as it may be useful to others hereafter.—

The Conversation with the King, Congress will form their own Judgement of it. I may expect from it a Residence less painful than I once expected, as so marked an Attention from the King will silence many Grumblers—but we can infer nothing from all this concerning the Success of my Mission.—

There are a Train of other Ceremonies to go thro’ The Queen and Visits to and from Ministers and Ambassadors, which will take up much Time and interrupt me in my Endeavours to obtain that I have at Heart—the Object of my Instructions. It is thus the Essence of Things are lost in Ceremony in every Country of Europe. We must submit to what we cannot alter—Patience is the only Remedy.—

With great regard & esteem &ca.

JOHN ADAMS

### *Source*

*The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780-1789*, Mary A. Giunta, Editor-in-Chief, Volume II. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1996.

NA: PCC, item 84, v. 5, pp. 477-484 (C); M247, reel 113